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Viewpoint

The Palestinian problem

(Part Two)

The Middle Eastern conflict kills Americans in this country. While there have been allegations of Arab conspiracies, terrorist acts were introduced into the United States by enemies of the Palestinians. Anyone who raises his voice to defend their rights as human beings is subject to attack.

A bomb murdered a policeman guarding the Boston offices of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC). Just Friday, a suspicious fire swept through the organization's Washington office; an ADC employee narrowly escaped with her life.

Alex Odeh was not that lucky. California police say the ADC West Coast director was the direct target of a tripwire explosive device. The night before his violent death, the Roman Catholic father of three daughters had appeared on television and praised the Palestine Liberation Organization. In an unusual statement, FBI spokesman Lane Bonner attributed Odeh's death to his TV remarks; he linked the bombing to the Jewish Defense League.

Alone among the major Western nations, the United States refuses any dialogue with the PLO; this country implicitly denies the existence of the only organization recognized by the Palestinian people themselves. Like him or not: Yasser Arafat is the legitimate voice of his people.

Various efforts to replace the PLO chairman have proven futile exercises. Furthermore, evidence suggests Arafat represents the moderate range in the Palestinian political spectrum. For his willingness to talk about Middle East peace, he has lost key associates, murdered by radicals. (This type of reasoning cost Alex Odeh his life.)

Washington reiterates, like a broken record, there can be no meeting until Arafat recognizes Israel's right to exist. But this makes no sense. Israel's existence does not depend upon the PLO. In addition, refusing to hold discussions with Yasser Arafat does not weaken his position with his constituency: the Palestinians and the Arab world.

Meeting with the PLO chairman does not mean bestowing a U.S. blessing on the man and his umbrella of factions. Negotiations with North Vietnam and North Korea smacked more of dealing with the devil; both those regimes were guilty of atrocities involving thousands of American deaths.

This is America's Palestinian problem. This nation lacks any logical reason for refusing to consider the fate of 800,000 West Bank Arab men, women and children — plus those in the Gaza Strip. Since World War II, the United States has opposed any nation retaining territory gained by military conquest — except those lands swept up by the Israelis in the 1967 war.

Washington continues to give lip-service to Woodrow Wilson's doctrine of a people's right to self determination, while enforcing a denial of that right to the Palestinian people. These glaring inconsistencies make hypocrisy of America's claim to represent the free world.

French President Francois Mitterrand became last week the latest Western leader to call for a Palestinian homeland on a West Bank and Gaza Strip liberated from Israeli control. This further increases America's isolation on the issue.

In fact, this country adopted its approach to the Palestinian question in

deference to an Israeli government, which is itself divided in this regard. A sizeable body of the Israeli public stages mass demonstrations calling for direct negotiations with the PLO. These Israeli citizens understand there can be no Middle East peace without an accommodation with the Palestinians.

This leaves American policy on the side of Israeli hardliners — many with bloody hands from their own terrorist activities. To cite one example: Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir headed the pro-Israel Stern Gang, condemned by David ben-Gurion and other responsible Jewish leaders for its massacres of innocent Arabs. Dead Palestinian babies — as in the Egypt Air hijacking — are no novelty to Shamir, scheduled to become again Israel's prime minister. It was this hardline faction that promoted the betrayal of U.S. secrets, as revealed in the recent spy case.

In the eyes of much of the world, including the Arabs, this country has aligned itself with those Israelis who have no genuine desire for peace in the Middle East. U.S. policy and actions — notably the massive funding for Israeli military power — make all Americans enemies of all Arabs. This costs American lives. Furthermore, in the long run, it serves neither the best interest of the Israeli people, nor the cause of world peace.

On the plus side: many people in this country — including a growing segment of the American Jewish community — understand the danger. The New Jewish Agenda and similar organizations are bucking the Jewish Defense League and the other hardliners. Terrorist acts in the United States could prove helpful to a greater understanding of the Middle East's realities.

But the United States government must face squarely its responsibilities to all the human beings in that part of the world; it has no viable choice but to seek justice for the Palestinian people, in accordance with longstanding American principals.

The observation stands: continuing confrontation in the Middle East can have but one ending — either the Israelis or the Arabs will feel forced to launch a nuclear attack. A possible US-USSR shootout pales by comparison.

In that event, all the dead babies would not be Palestinians, forgettable for their lack of nationality.